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Source: *Folklore*, Mar. 31, 1924, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Mar. 31, 1924), pp. 57-63

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1255782>

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THE MAGIC OF THE FINNS IN RELATION TO THAT OF OTHER ARCTIC PEOPLES.

BY W. BONSER.

*(A paper read before the Liverpool Meeting of the British
Association, Sept. 13th, 1923).*

THE religion of the Finns as portrayed in the Kalevala shows a transition state between nature worship and mediæval Christianity, which was introduced as the official religion from Sweden in the twelfth century. The older religion continued to live beneath the surface, and the only appreciable difference was that a few more names were added with which to conjure, and a few more unknown powers to be invoked. One ancient writer says that the two favourite deities were Vainamoinen and the Virgin Mary. To give but one instance of the result: in a healing charm the Virgin is requested to "take Vainamoinen's belt and his yellow cloak with which to bind up a cut vein." ¹

The shamanism thus gradually displaced was a belief in sorcery: magic is its very essence, and spells are its liturgy, because the belief that every object contains a spirit (in Finnish *haltia*) necessitates a belief also in magic to influence such spirits. It is a striving after both science and religion at once, without the power to distinguish the one from the other. "Shamanism," says Banzaroff, "originated among the Mongolic nations, and consists not only in superstitious ceremonies . . . but in a certain primitive way of observing the outer world—nature—and the inner world—the soul." ² "Saman is a Manchu word, meaning one who is excited." ³

¹ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 177. b.

² M. A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia*, p. 167.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Shamanism was the religion of the Finno-Ugrians while still in Asia, and it remained after their arrival in their present home. That it survived there so long with so little change can only be accounted for by the isolation of the Finns, through many centuries, from any considerable external religious influence. But while shamanism in Siberia has to a slight extent been influenced by contact with the higher Asiatic religions, so also in Europe it has been influenced by Christianity ; and it is probable that, since it is not in itself conducive to the production of myths, this contact was what gave the greatest impulse to the production of a national poetry among the Finns. Krohn says the spells also date from Christian times only, since they show the influence of Scandinavian charms. Personally I do not hold with this view, but believe that, broadly speaking, the majority of charms, Finnish and otherwise, are of heathen origin, and were adopted, and adapted, by Christianity.

The Finnish shaman was supposed to derive his power from the supreme god, Jumala. Hence, logically, the Creator himself is the greatest sorcerer, and in the *Kalevala*⁴ he is called "Jumala, the great magician." The shaman is the seer, who, through the help of Jumala, is capable of performing miracles. To do so, he recites his spells : but in case these should not be efficient of themselves, he usually adds a prayer either to Jumala himself, or else to that one of the minor deities who at the time is more immediately concerned. The usual idea of spells is to coerce the gods, —here it is not so : the shaman is the minister, not the opponent, of the higher powers ; the magic is derived from the gods, and not used against them. In Siberia there are black and white shamans, but in Finnish literature and legend I have found no trace of the former. The ideal shaman is at once priest, medicine-man, and prophet. Such is Vainamoinen in the *Kalevala*. The more primitive

⁴ Rune III. 201-2.

his tribe, the more duties the shaman has to perform, but among the more advanced Siberian tribes he is able to specialise.

Like the mediaeval witch, the shaman was supposed to have attendant spirits. This is shown in the following passage in the Finnish Magic Songs⁵—"My darling god, my powerful *haltia*, ever assisted me when among the sorcerers." The "sorcerers" would be Lapp, for in Finnish mythology the Lapps are usually the workers of black magic. "To the believer," says Czaplicka,⁶ "the acceptance of the call, means accepting several spirits, or at least one, as protectors or servants, by which means the Shaman enters into communication with the whole spirit world . . . If the person is dilatory in obeying, the calling spirit soon appears in some outward visible shape." Among the shapes given by Scheffer in his "Lapponia" are fishes, birds, serpents, and pigmies a yard high. With the Koryak, according to Jochelson,⁷ they appear as the wolf, bear, raven, sea-gull, and eagle. Among the Chukchee the spirit speaks its own language, if it happens to be any animal except the fox, wolf, or raven, which can speak in the language of men.⁸

Magic powers, again as in the case of the mediaeval witch, appear to have been passed on from father to son, since the sorcerer boasts that he has inherited them from his ancestors. In the *Kalevala*, Lemminkainen speaks of his being taught magic by his father. Tornaëus says that the Laplanders "bequeathed the demons as part of their inheritance, which is the reason that one family excels the other in this magical art." If the Ostyak shaman has no children, he may pass on the office to a friend, or to an adopted child. He occasionally sells his familiar spirit to another shaman,⁹ and from evidence of the mediaeval

⁵ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 2 et seq.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁷ *Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, vol. vi. p. 47.

⁸ M. A. Czaplicka, *op. cit.*, p. 231. ⁹ M. A. Czaplicka, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

witches the so-called spirit was a *concrete* object or creature.

Among the "origins" given in the Finnish Magic Songs is that of the wizard. It says that he was born and bred "beyond the limit of the north, in the Lapps' flat open land . . . on a bed of fir-boughs, upon a pillow of stone."¹⁰ In another (and I presume later) song, the sorcerer is swung by a Laplander "in a cradle made of iron";¹¹ in each case he originated in Lapland. Now, if the Lapps were already in the land when the Finns arrived there, it would be only natural that they should influence the religion of the incoming people. Being the more potent magicians, they might be applied to by the Finns in cases of difficulty, because they would "know the manner of the god of the land." According to Scheffer,¹² in former days Lapland was a school of shamans, and the neighbouring tribes sent their youths there for training.

It is curious that there is no mention in the *Kalevala* of the drum, which is especially associated with Lapp magic. The drum was made of pine, fir, or beech wood, with skin stretched across, on which were figures painted in red. They were struck with two runic hammers, made from the horns of the reindeer. The Lapp sorcerer also had recourse to arrows and darts with which to injure his enemies. When Lemminkainen is setting out for Lapland, he prays to various spirits to protect him, "that the sorcerers' arrows strike not." To protect themselves from these arrows, the *Kalevala* heroes sometimes wear armour.

Billson, speaking of the Lapps, says that "when anyone was to enter the ranks of the shamans, he was baptized."¹³ In the Magic Songs occurs the passage, "My mother washed me naked on a nether stone, three times upon a summer night, to become a wizard . . . a singer . . . a good per-

¹⁰ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 207. ¹¹ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 14 f. ¹² *Lapponia*, p. 120.

¹³ J. Hastings, *Encyclopædia of Religion etc.*, vol. ix. p. 170.

former when abroad.”¹⁴ From a similar passage in the *Kalevala*, it would appear that baptism not only served as a rite of initiation, but also was intended to make the recipients invulnerable. Here Lemminkainen says: “My devoted mother washed me, when a frail and tender baby. Three times in the nights of summer, Nine times in the nights of autumn, That upon my journeys northward, I might sing the ancient wisdom, Thus protect myself from danger.” The dipping of Achilles by his mother Thetis in the Styx is an obvious comparison. Krohn remarks that “the baptism was not administered by the magician, but by a woman, usually the mother herself.”¹⁵ In the *Kalevala*, the mother of the Nine Diseases baptises these children herself.

For the successful performance of magical rites, three things especially appear to have been most important,—night, nudity, and the neighbourhood of rocks or stones. All these occur, for instance, in the last quotation from the Magic Songs (“My mother washed me *naked*, on a nether *stone*, three times upon a summer *night*”).

In one folk-song, a Lapp magician, having seated himself on a rock, takes off his coat and turns it inside out, so as to increase his power. The Chukchee shaman performs with the upper part of the body naked.¹⁶ But it was more usually the practice, especially in summer time, for the sorcerer to take off all his clothes. For instance (quoting from the Finnish Magic Songs),¹⁷ “Sorcerers once were bewitching me, three Laplanders attempted it, nine extra wicked ones, three summer nights, nine autumn nights, completely bare, without a rag of clothes.” Comparisons from other parts of the world, such as the story of Lady Godiva and fertility rites, are too numerous to be quoted. But in the prophecies of Merlin, in Geoffrey of Monmouth,¹⁸ occurs a magic recipe for him who has to slay dragons,

¹⁴ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 14. c.

¹⁵ J. Hastings, *op. cit.*, vol. ii. p. 647.

¹⁶ M. A. Czaplicka, *op. cit.*, p. 206. ¹⁷ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 14. b. ¹⁸ Bk. 12. 4.

which I would like to quote, since it specially bears on this question. "Upon the back of one shall he climb with a sword, and sever his head from his body. Then, putting off his garment, shall he climb upon another and grasp his tail in his right hand and his left, for naked shall he vanquish him against whom clad he might naught prevail."

Similarly it seems to have been the practice to put on extra clothing as a defence against the spells of sorcerers. The donning of armour as a protection from their arrows has already been mentioned. In one passage of the *Magic Songs*,¹⁹ the sorcerer says, "Five suits I'll don on a blue stone's back . . . There I shall . . . protect myself, Equip myself in copper socks, Shall gird myself with a copper belt . . . against a variegated stone . . . and a sorcerer's arrows will not hurt." Another asks that the fur-coat of his sire may be brought from the land of the dead and put on him, that no sorcerers' arrows may penetrate.²⁰

Of the significance of rocks and stones many examples have already been given, and I could give many more.

Since the spirits of dead shamans were thought to be more powerful than living ones, the land of the dead came to be regarded as a store-house of shamanic wisdom. Hence the visits of Vainamöinen in the *Kalevala* to Tuonela (the land of the dead), and to the grave of the song giant Vipunen, in order to obtain his three lost words of master-magic. The Samoyed believes that there is no future life after the decay of the body, except for the shaman. Sternberg speaks of a great Gilyak shaman who possessed four souls, "one from the mountains, another from the sea, a third from the sky, and a fourth from the underworld."²¹

Since the instincts of primitive folk are the same all the world over, it is natural that they should regard the workings of nature with the same superstitious awe. Students of magic, therefore, who are unacquainted with that of

¹⁹ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 2. a.

²⁰ *Loitsu-runoja*, § 2. b.

²¹ M. A. Czaplicka, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

Finland, will at once recognise how much Finnish magic has in common with that of other peoples. Such differences as there are, arise largely from the geographical conditions being different. The intense cold, added to the difficulties of living and solitude of the tundra, produces what is known as "Arctic hysteria," which accounts for the ecstasies of the shamanic rites.

I have endeavoured to show that Finnish and Lapp magic was isolated, until comparatively modern times, from external influence except that of other Arctic peoples. Among these, however, the practices correspond so closely that Arctic magic is essentially the same from Finland and Lapland on the west to Kamchatka on the east.

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